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GALLERY

pages 37 - 48
JONATAS

COVERS

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Wraparound

MATT MARTIN
Gore

RENATO CAMILO
Brutal
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Fifty Shades Intense
Fifty Shades Torture

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MATT MARTIN
page 3
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pages 4 - 7
RAULO CACERES
page 8
RENATO CAMILO

HORRIFIED COVERS

DANIEL GETE
Horried
Horried Intense
Horried Torn

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Horried Century

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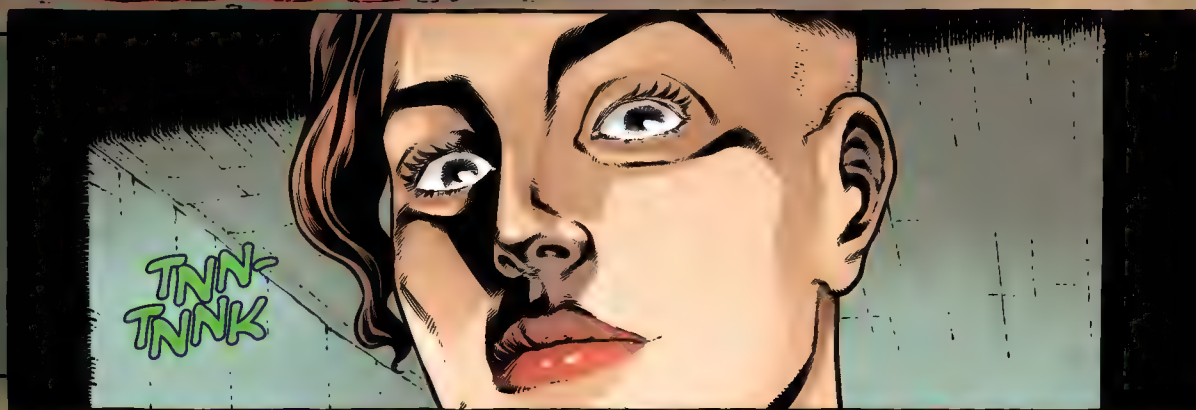
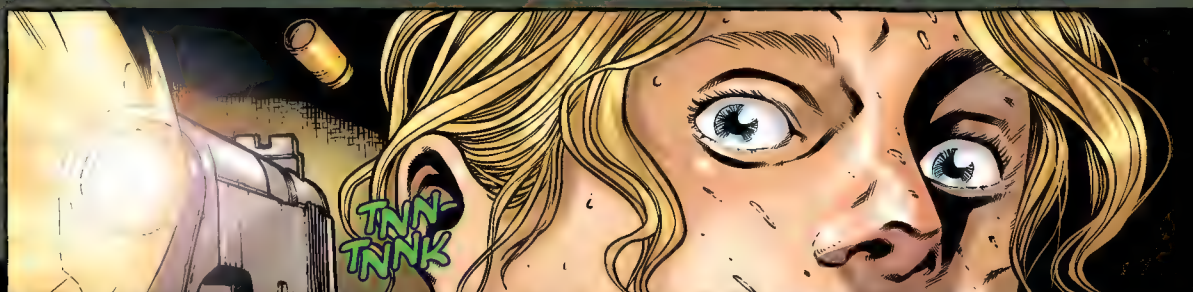
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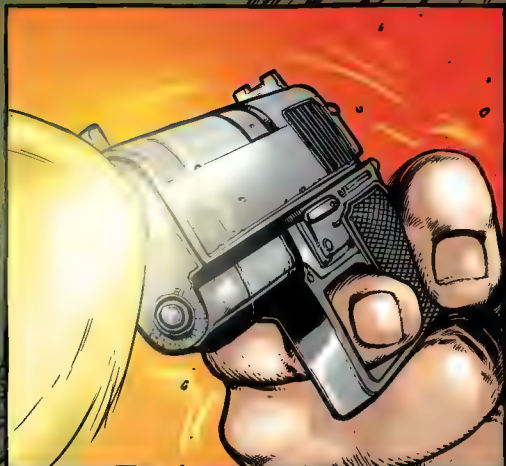
THE STITCHED ARE AN ANCIENT, UNDEAD EVIL. A CURSED BLACK LIQUID FILLS MORTAL SHELLS THAT HAVE HAD ALL OPENINGS SEWN SHUT, TAKING THEIR LIFE AND MUMMIFYING THEIR BODY. THEY BECOME STITCHED, AND THEN RESPOND TO ONLY ONE THING, THE SOUND OF ROCKS IN A CAN, WHICH UNLEASHES THEM IN AN INDISCRIMINATE KILLING RAMPAGE. THEY FEEL NO PAIN. THEY CAN LOSE LIMBS, BE SHOT, BURNED, AND CRUSHED. ALL TO NO AVAIL, THEY WILL NOT STOP UNTIL THE SOUND THAT DRIVES THEM CEASES.

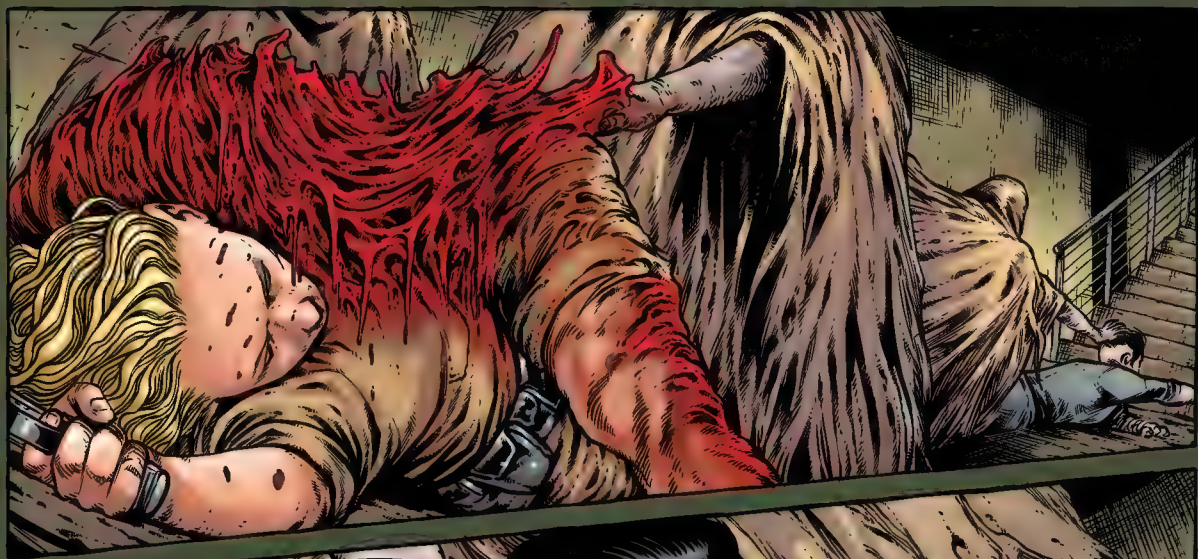
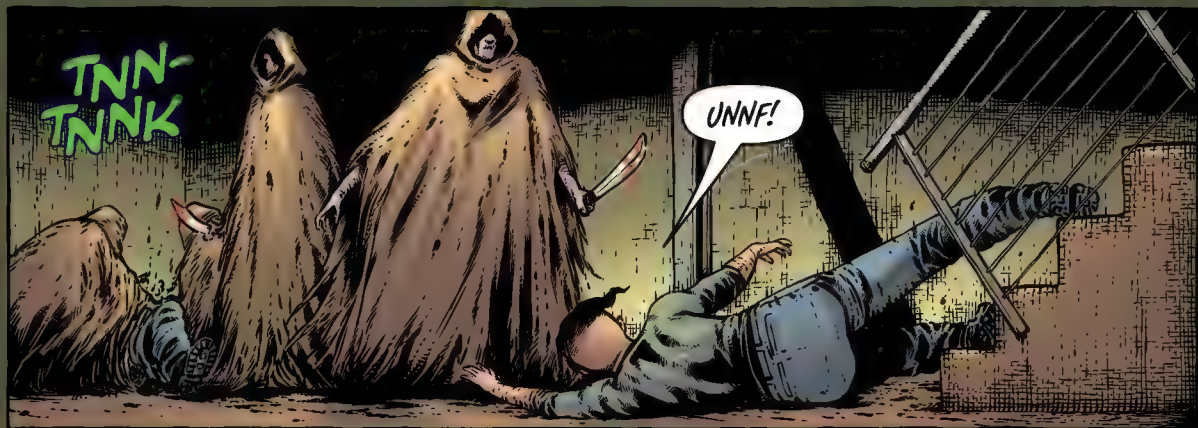






TNN-TNKK

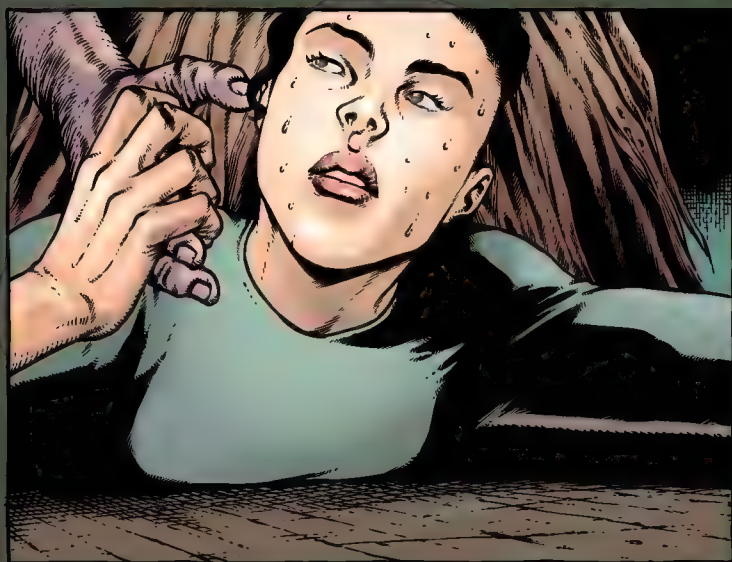














<TO A NEW
WORLD.>



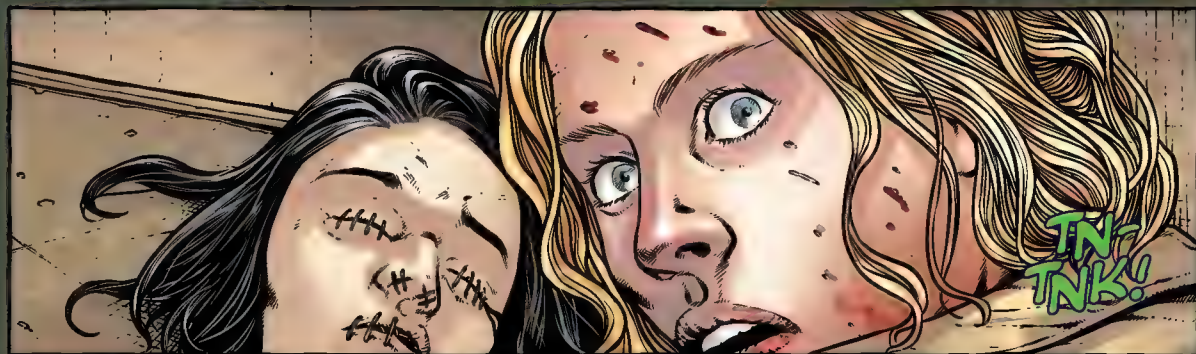
MYRA, BABY, I'VE GOT
YOU. I'VE GOT YOU, SWEET
GIRL. EVERYTHING...
EVERYTHING'S GOING
TO BE...

OH GOD,
YOU'RE JUST
EIGHTEEN, YOU
SHOULD BE OUT
CHASING BOYS.
OH GOD, WHAT
DID THEY DO TO
YOU?

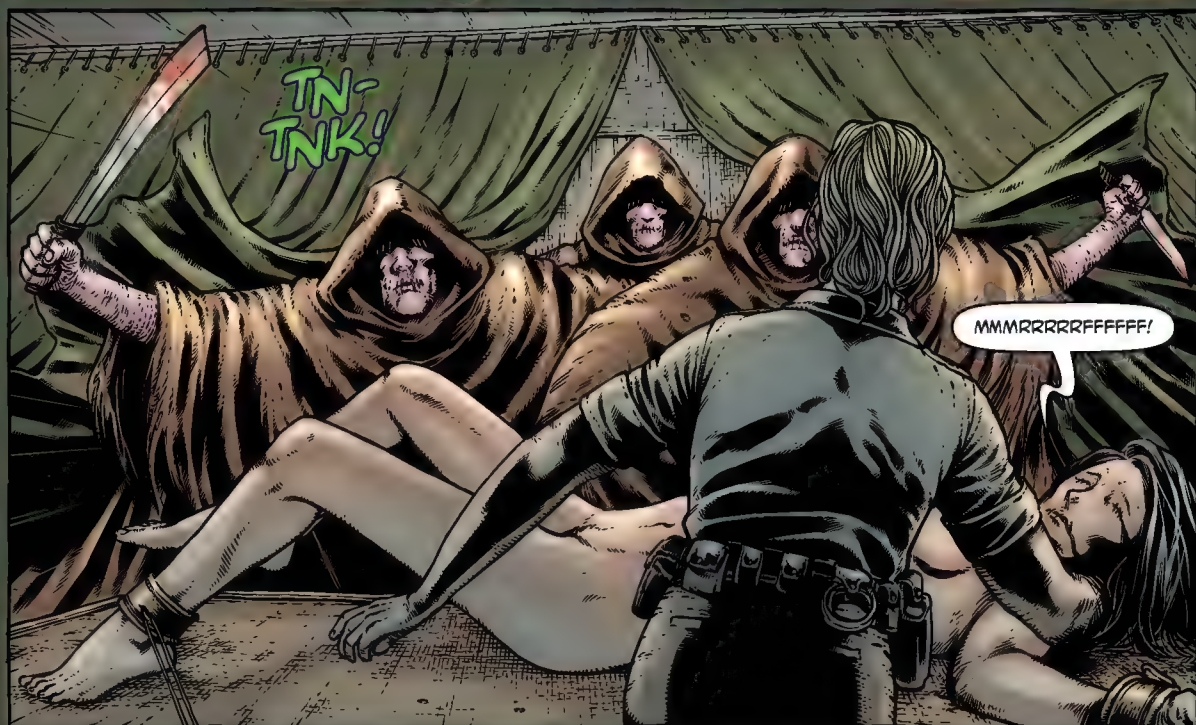


<TO A NEW
WORLD!>

TN-
TNK!

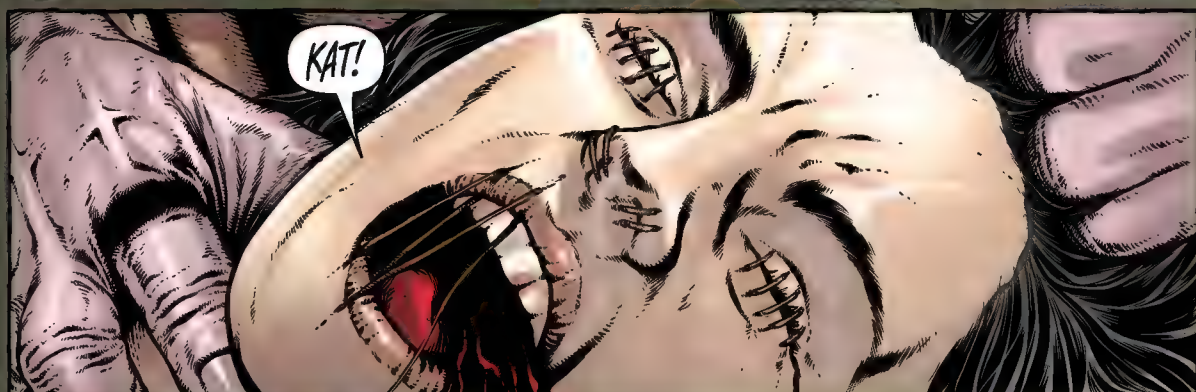


TN-
TNK!



TN-
TNK!

MMRRRRRRFFFFF!





<GOODNIGHT,
MY SISTER.>



<WHERE ARE
YOU, KILLER? WHERE
DID YOU...>



<NEVER
TRIGGER THE SIGNAL
IF YOU AREN'T AWARE
WHERE YOUR SISTERS
ARE.>

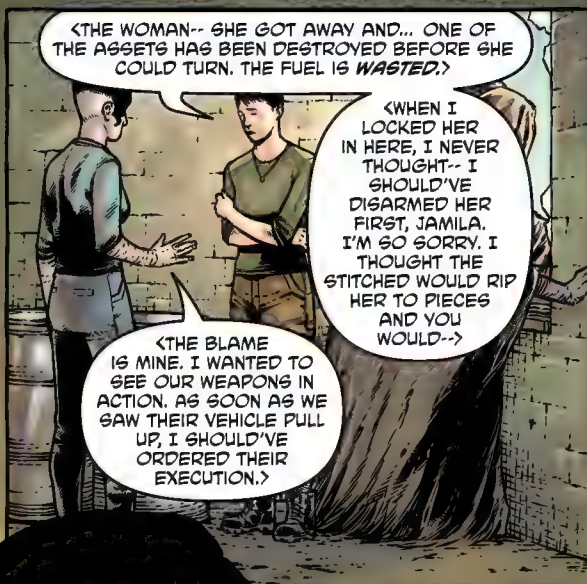
<JAMILA!>



<YOUR LEG!
YOU'RE HURT. DID
YOU GET -->

<THE
FEMALE MANAGED TO
CLIP ME, FARIBA. IT'S NO
MORE THAN A FLESH WOUND,
BUT IT CAUGHT ME OFF
GUARD. I FELL, BUT
MANAGED TO GRAB THE CAN
RIGHT AWAY. HEH. ALMOST
MAKES ONE QUESTION
THE VIRTUE OF
FAITHLESSNESS.>

<I'M NOT
ANGRY WITH YOU. JUST BE
AWARE OF WHAT WE'RE
DEALING WITH.>



<THE WOMAN-- SHE GOT AWAY AND... ONE OF
THE ASSETS HAS BEEN DESTROYED BEFORE SHE
COULD TURN. THE FUEL IS WASTED.>

<WHEN I
LOCKED HER
IN HERE, I NEVER
THOUGHT-- I
SHOULD'VE
DISARMED HER
FIRST, JAMILA.
I'M SO SORRY. I
THOUGHT THE
STITCHED WOULD RIP
HER TO PIECES
AND YOU
WOULD-->

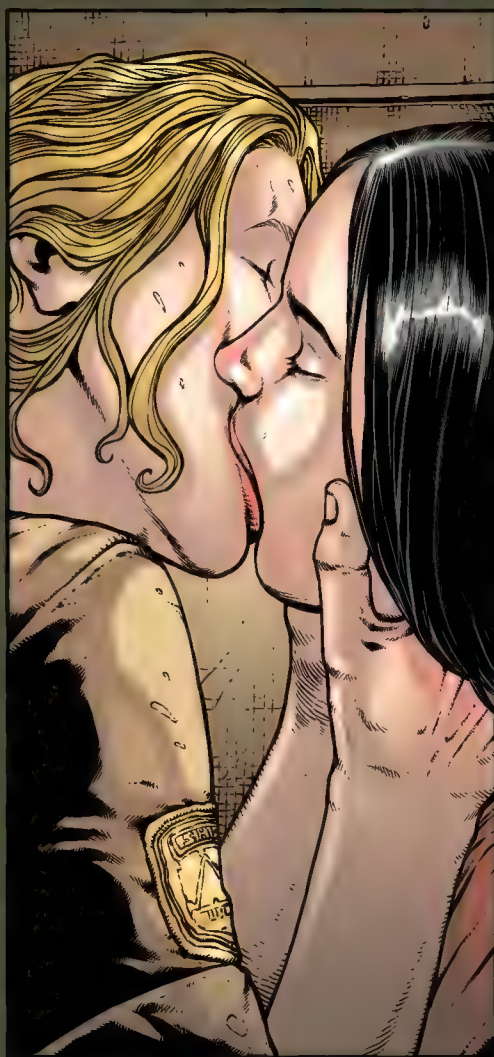
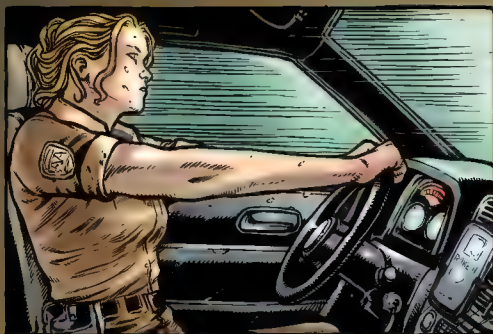
<THE BLAME
IS MINE. I WANTED TO
SEE OUR WEAPONS IN
ACTION. AS SOON AS WE
SAW THEIR VEHICLE PULL
UP, I SHOULD'VE
ORDERED THEIR
EXECUTION.>

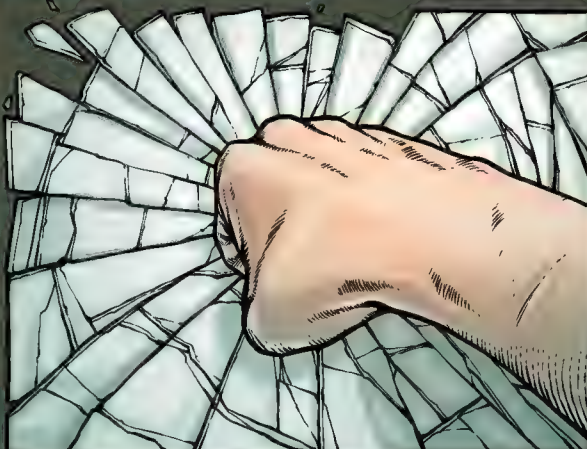
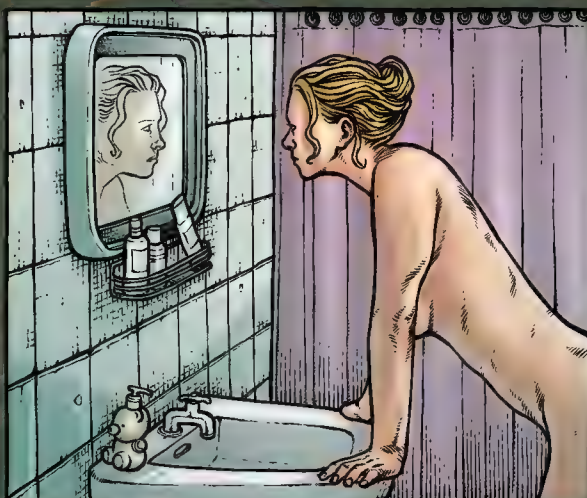
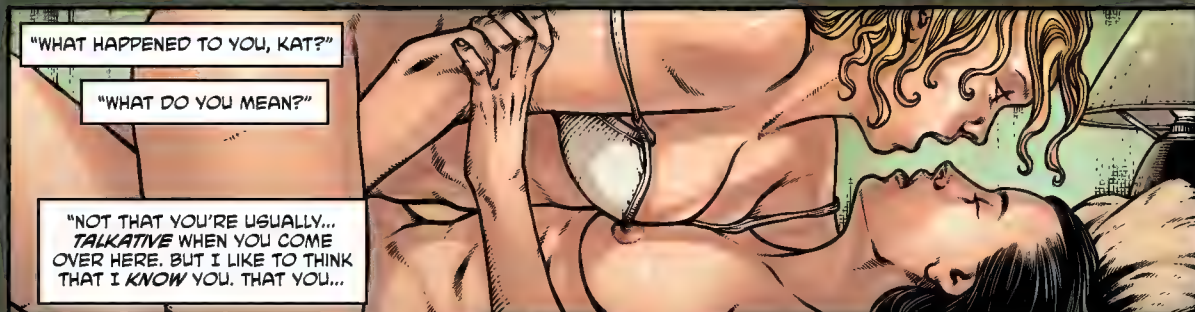


<WHAT DO
WE DO NOW,
JAMILA?>

<IT'LL
TAKE THAT
DEVIL AN HOUR
TO RETURN TO
CIVILIZATION. AN
HOUR AND A
HALF TO TWO
BEFORE SHE
RETURNS WITH
BACK-UP.>









I GUESS
I'M JUST A PIECE
OF SHIT.



<ALL
LOADED.>



<WHEN
WE GET
CAUGHT, YOU
KNOW WHAT
THEY'LL SAY
ABOUT US,
DON'T
YOU?>

<THEY'LL
CALL US A
SPLINTER CELL. THEY
WON'T DISTINGUISH US
FROM THE MEN WHO
TERRORIZED OUR
LANDS. AT *FIRST*,
ANYWAY. BUT
LATER...AFTER, THEY
WILL KNOW US...>

<YES. OF
COURSE THEY WILL,
JAMILA.>



<I WISH YOU COULD'VE SEEN MY SISTER. SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL. WARM, LOVING. *HAPPY*. SHE DIDN'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT WHAT MY PARENTS WERE DOING, FIGHTING AGAINST THE TALIBAN. ASSISTING THE AMERICANS...>

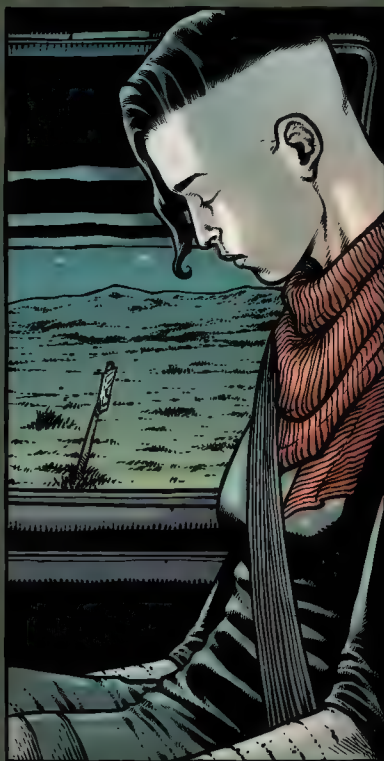
<I WAS OLDER, SO THEY TOLD ME.>

<WHICH MEANS I WAS ALSO OLD ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND WHO CONTROLLED THE DRONES THAT TURNED MY SISTER'S BODY INTO A PILE OF BROKEN BONES AND RIPPED FLESH.>



<NOT THE MEN WE'D FOUGHT.>

<THAT'S WHEN I KNEW. IT WASN'T JUST THE TALIBAN. IT WASN'T JUST THE AMERICANS. THERE'S SOMETHING *WRONG* WITH THE WORLD, FARIBA. WITH THE PEOPLE.>



<TURN AROUND.>



<WHAT?>

<TURN AROUND. SIGNAL THE OTHERS TO FOLLOW.>

<ARE-- ARE YOU SURE? *WHY?*>

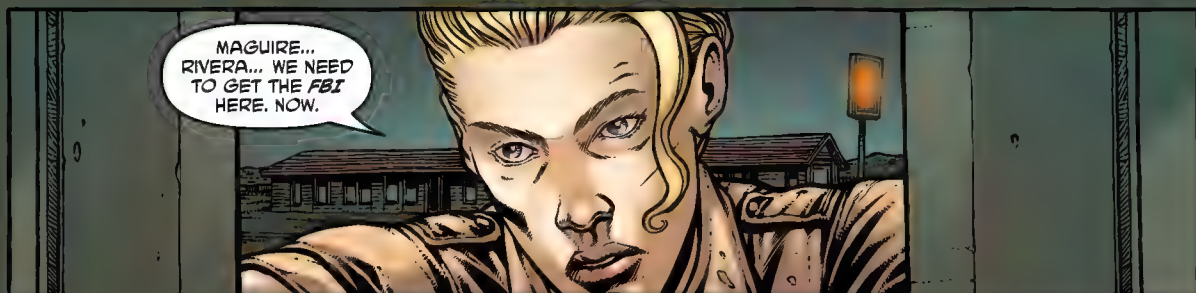


<BECAUSE
WE'RE GOING
BACK.>



WELL, I'LL
BE DAMNED. *THERE*
SHE IS!

JESUS,
SHERIFF, YOU AND VAN
GO ON A BENDER OR
SOMETHING? WE'VE BEEN
TRYING TO--



MAGUIRE...
RIVERA... WE NEED
TO GET THE *FBI*
HERE. NOW.



KAT.

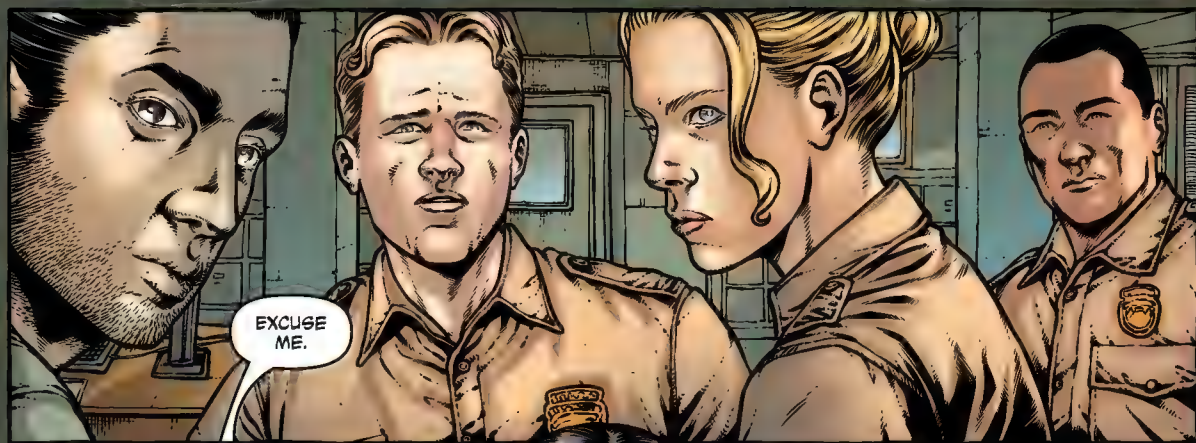
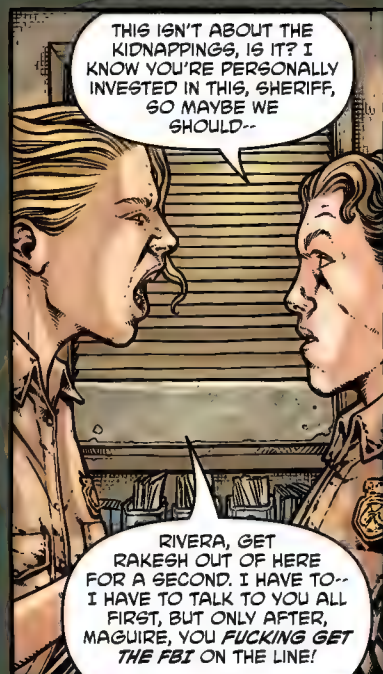
WE'RE
CALLING THE
FBI... *WHY?*

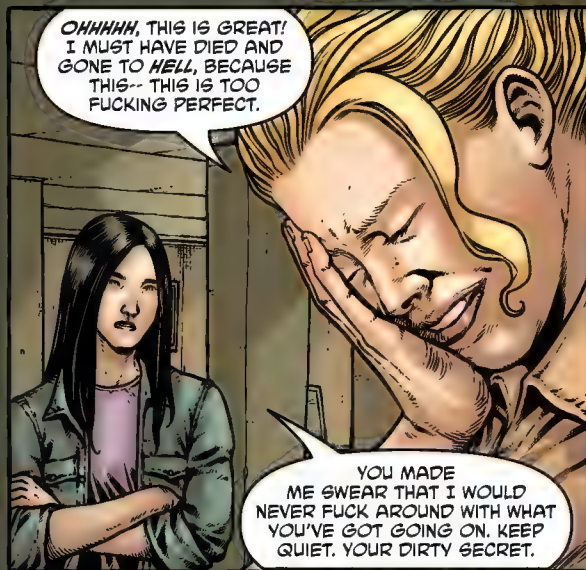


I'VE BEEN UP ALL
NIGHT WORRYING.
WHEN YOU DIDN'T
COME HOME, I
CALLED THE
STATION, AND
THEY SAID--

I'M FINE,
RAKESH. I'LL
EXPLAIN LATER.
MAGUIRE-- DO
WHAT I SAID.
NOW.

WHAT
HAPPENED,
BABY?





OHHHHH, THIS IS GREAT! I MUST HAVE DIED AND GONE TO HELL, BECAUSE THIS-- THIS IS TOO FUCKING PERFECT.

YOU MADE ME SWEAR THAT I WOULD NEVER FUCK AROUND WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT GOING ON. KEEP QUIET. YOUR DIRTY SECRET.



I ACCEPTED THAT YOU WERE IN A RELATIONSHIP, THAT I WAS THIS BIG, BAD THING YOU WERE HIDING... BUT YOU CAN'T TREAT ME LIKE THIS.

I AM A FUCKING HUMAN BEING.

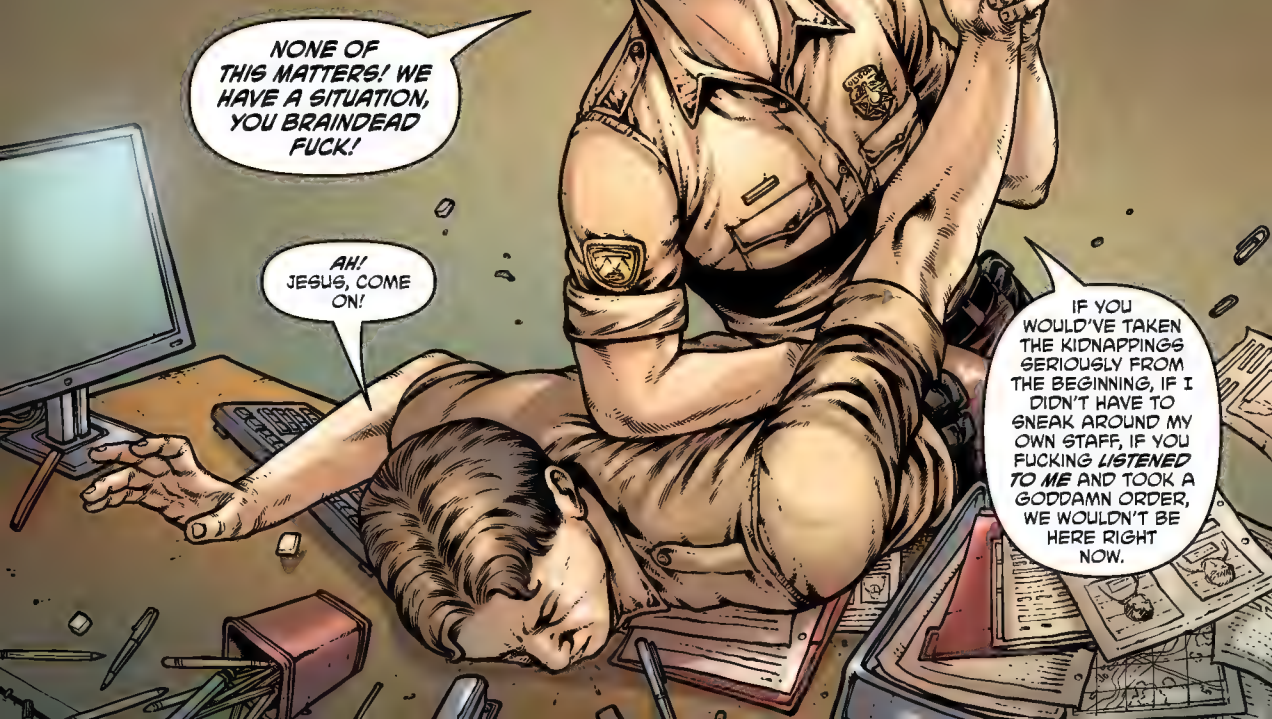
KAT, WHO IS THIS WOMAN?



NO SHIT! SHERRIFF'S A MUNCHER.



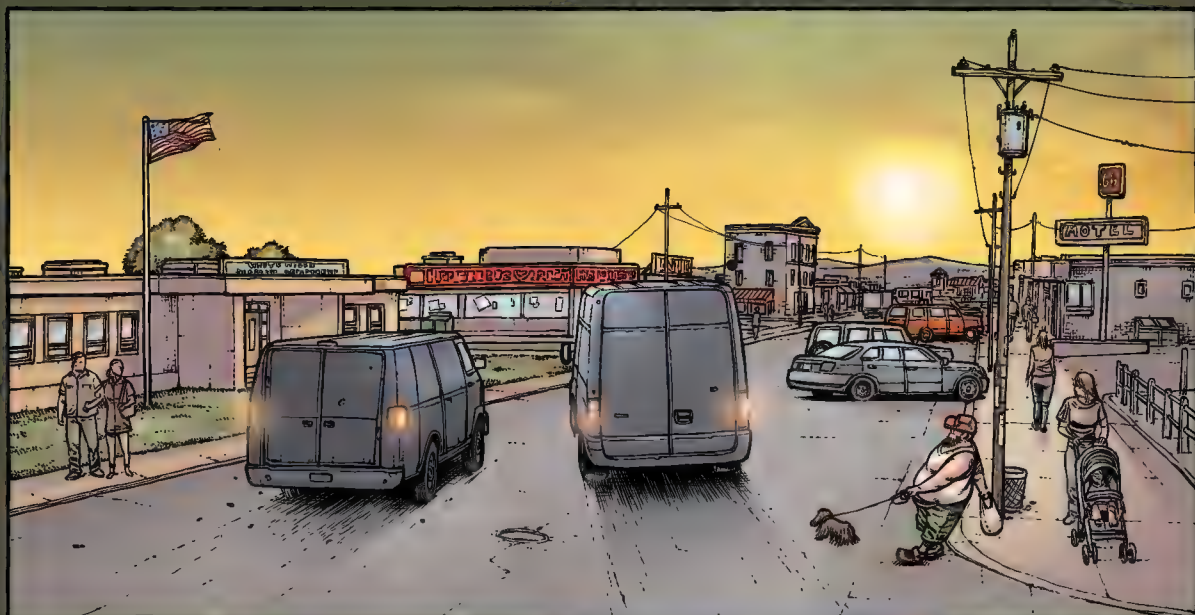
YOU INSUBORDINATE PIECE OF SHIT.

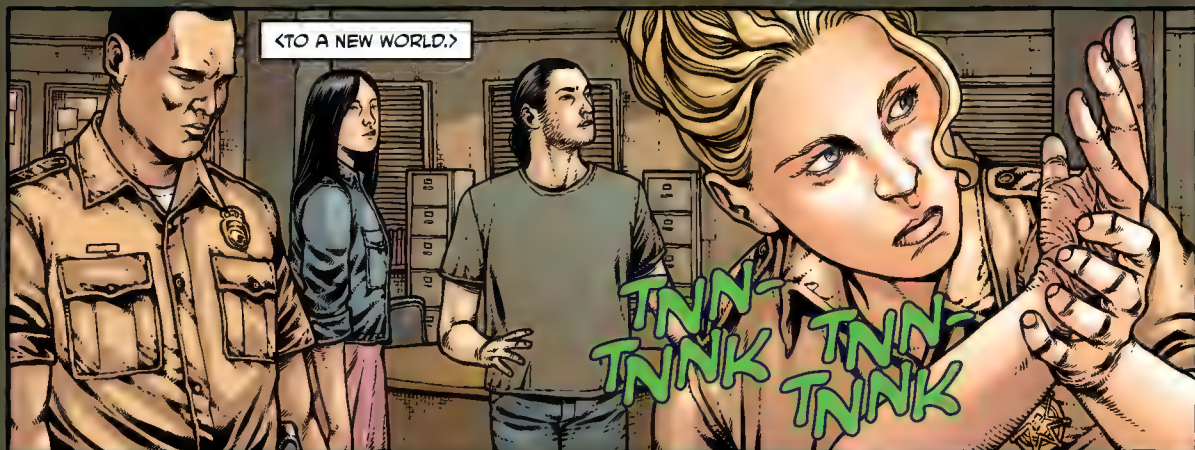
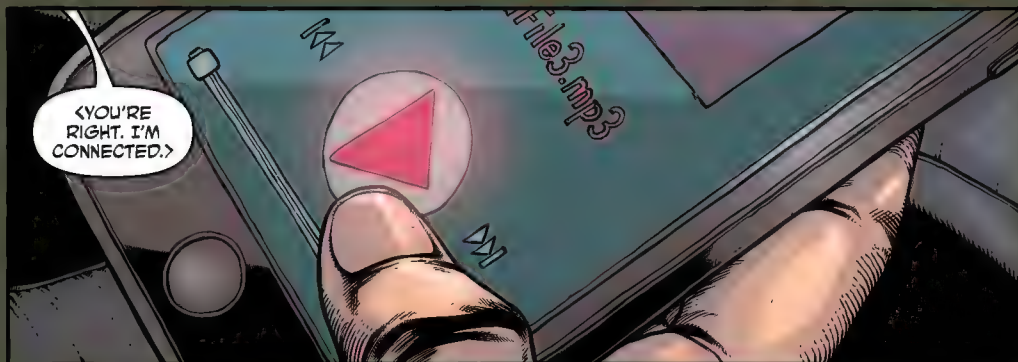
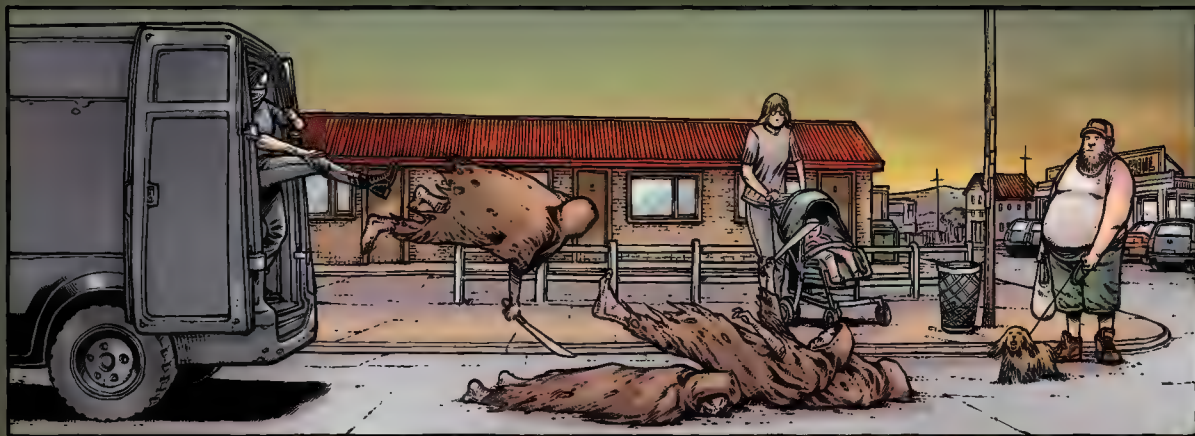


NONE OF THIS MATTERS! WE HAVE A SITUATION, YOU BRAINDEAD FUCK!

AH! JESUS, COME ON!

IF YOU WOULD'VE TAKEN THE KIDNAPPINGS SERIOUSLY FROM THE BEGINNING, IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO SNEAK AROUND MY OWN STAFF, IF YOU FUCKING LISTENED TO ME AND TOOK A GODDAMN ORDER, WE WOULDN'T BE HERE RIGHT NOW.







TNN-
TNNK

TNN-
TNNK

TNN-
TNNK

TNN-
TNNK

TNN-
TNNK

TNN-
TNNK

NEXT
THE
FAITHLESS

STITCHED: CADAVER

A GRAPHIC GRIMOIRE







CADAVER - PART TWO

WHEN HER MOTHER STOPPED TALKING, JAMILA FOUND HERSELF IN STUNNED SILENCE. SHE'D ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT SHE WAS OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT THE INJURY, BUT HEARING HER MOTHER RECOUNT THE DETAILS SEEMED SURREAL. JAMILA'S MIND HAD SO VIVIDLY IMAGINED THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BAD MEN IN THE PAST. SHE PICTURED THEM AS VICIOUS DOGS, DEVILS IN THE SKIN OF MEN WHO WOULD COME TO HAPPY HOMES TO STEAL THE CHILDREN, TO TAKE THE WOMEN, TO FORCE THE MEN TO DO UNSPEAKABLE ACTS. SHE PICTURED THEM WITH KNIVES AT THE READY TO SLIT THROATS. SHE PICTURED HER MOTHER'S NECK BEING CUT OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

SO TO HEAR HER MOTHER RECOUNT THE ACTUAL EVENT WITH SUCH DISTANCE FROM IT DIDN'T MAKE HER FEEL ADULT AT ALL. IT TERRIFIED HER... BECAUSE THAT WASN'T EVEN THE WORST PART OF THE STORY. THE WORST PART WASN'T HAPPENING IN THE PAST. IT WASN'T A MEMORY OF A SCAR THAT HAD LONG SINCE HEALED. IT WAS HAPPENING **NOW**. AND **HERE**.

"THE MEN YOUR FATHER IS HELPING," JAMILA'S MOTHER HAD SAID, "ARE HERE TO FIND A SPECIAL GROUP OF PEOPLE. THEY HAVE HEARD RUMORS SPREADING ABOUT AN UNSTOPPABLE WEAPON."

"THESE ARE THE SAME MEN WHO HURT YOU?" JAMILA HAD ASKED. "I DO NOT THINK SO," HER MOTHER HAD SAID. "THEY MAY SHARE THE SAME IDEOLOGY. PERHAPS SOME OF THE SAME METHODS." JAMILA NOTICED AT THIS POINT HER MOTHER SHIFTED THE SHEETS UP TO COVER HER NECK, AS IF EVEN BRINGING UP WHAT HAPPENED TO HER MIGHT CONJURE THE MEN WHO HURT HER FORTH LIKE DEMONS CALLED BY NAME THREE TIMES. "BUT THESE MEN... WHAT YOU AND YOUR SISTER FOUND... IT HAS GIVEN CREDENCE TO WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR. THEY THINK YOUR FATHER CAN HELP THEM FIND WHERE THIS WEAPON IS BEING MADE."

"THE WEAPON WAS USED ON THE MAN WE FOUND?"

JAMILA'S MOTHER DIDN'T SEEM TO WANT TO CONTINUE SPEAKING, BUT, AFTER A MOMENT OF PAUSE, SHE POWERED THROUGH. JAMILA HAD SENSED HER MOTHER, THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE STORY, HAD TO KEEP CONVINCING HERSELF THAT JAMILA COULD HANDLE THE BURDEN OF KNOWLEDGE HERE. THE PAUSES UNNERVED JAMILA MORE THAN THE STORY ITSELF.

"THE MAN," HER MOTHER HAD SAID, "WAS THE WEAPON. ONE OF THEM, AT LEAST..."

IT WAS THEN THAT HER MOTHER DISMISSED HER, TELLING HER TO GO TO BED. JAMILA LISTENED, WONDERING WHY HER MOTHER HAD TOLD HER SO MUCH, AND ALLOWING HER MIND TO RUN WILD AS SHE IMAGINED WHAT WAS LEFT UNSAID. PEOPLE, SHE THOUGHT, WERE BEING MADE INTO WEAPONS. SHE WONDERED IF SHE AND HESTER HAD BEEN IN TERRIBLE DANGER WHEN THEY'D UNEARTHED WHAT, TO HER, HAD BEEN A VICTIM. SHE WONDERED IF THEIR DISCOVERY HAD HELPED HER FATHER. IF IT WOULD HELP THE GREEN MEN FIND AND STOP THE BAD MEN.

SHE WONDERED WHAT THE BAD MEN WOULD DO TO HER AND HESTER IF THEY KNEW ABOUT THEIR DISCOVERY. IT WOULD BE WORSE, SHE WAS SURE, THAN THE INJURY.

WHEN JAMILA LAY DOWN IN BED, HESTER SPOKE IMMEDIATELY. "I WONDER WHO HE WAS." JAMILA WINCED.

"DID YOU HEAR US?" JAMILA SNAPPED, MORE VENOM IN HER TONE THAT SHE WANTED. "DID YOU HEAR MOM?"

"NO," HESTER SAID. JAMILA FELT INSTANT RELIEF. SHE DIDN'T WANT HER SISTER TO KNOW WHAT SHE KNEW. IT WAS, SHE KNEW NOW, TOO MUCH.

"WHAT IF HE HAD A FAMILY?" HESTER ASKED. "LIKE MOM, YOU KNOW? THEY TRIED TO CUT HER HEAD OFF... WHAT IF THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?"

"STOP THINKING ABOUT IT," JAMILA SAID.

"I CAN'T."

"FINE," JAMILA SAID. "JUST NEVER GO BACK THERE. PROMISE ME."



"IT'S MY SCHOOL..."

"YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN," JAMILA SAID. "THE HOLE, HESTER. THE HOLE YOU DUG. NEVER, EVER LOOK THERE AGAIN. NO VISITING, NO DIGGING, NOTHING."

"OKAY." "HESTER, PROMISE ME. PROMISE ON OUR FAMILY." "I PROMISE."

DAVID RUDD STOOD AT THE FRONT OF THE GROUP OF SOLDIERS, LOOKING DOWN WITH DISGUST AT THE BODY PARTS THEY HAD SPENT THE BETTER PART OF THE DAY LINEARTHING. HE WONDERED HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE UNDER THEIR FEET, AND HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE TO PUT TOGETHER THIS MORBID PUZZLE INTO A WHOLE HUMAN BEING.

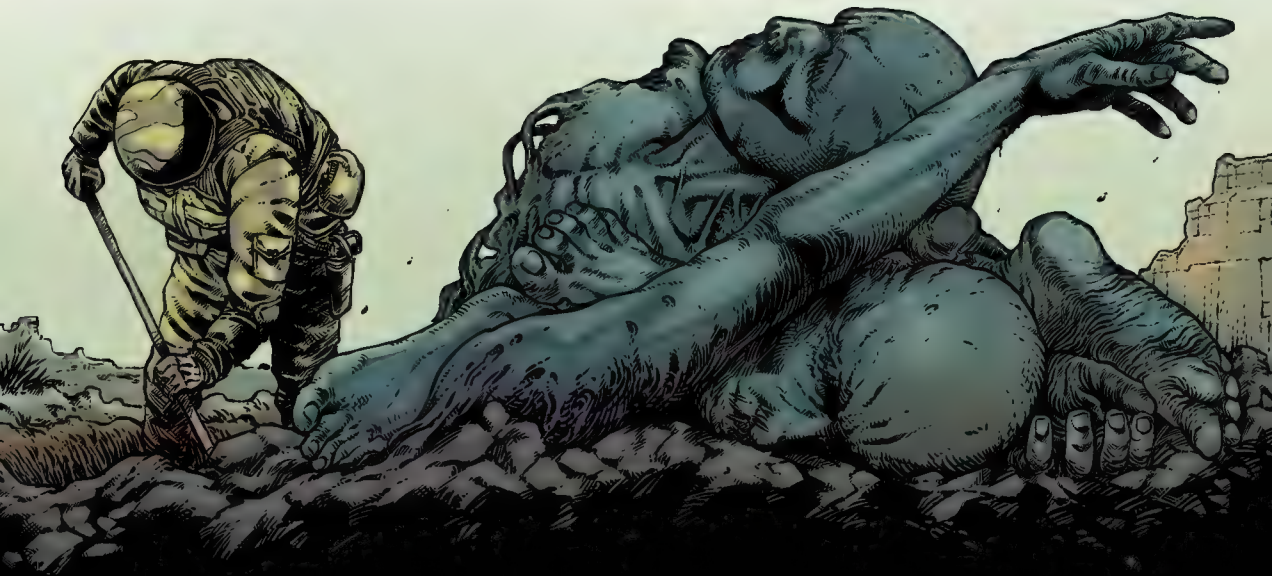
THAT IS, OF COURSE, IF A HUMAN BEING WAS TRULY WHAT HE WAS STILL LOOKING AT. THE GRIM STORIES HE HEARD SEEMED TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE STITCHES THAT THREADED THE CADAVER'S LIPS TOGETHER, BUT HE COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL IN HIS GUT THAT IT WAS JUST ANOTHER MYTH IN A LAND OF MYTHS.

THESE PEOPLE, HE THOUGHT, DIDN'T EVEN BELIEVE IN GOD. THEIRS WENT BY A DIFFERENT NAME AND HAD DIFFERENT RULES. TO DAVID, NOTHING WAS MORE ABSURD. IF THEY BELIEVED THAT, THEY'D BELIEVE ANYTHING.

HE REMAINED SKEPTICAL.

"HEY! INCOMING!"

HIS BUDDY GERALD'S VOICE BROKE HIM OUT OF HIS TRANCE. HE IMMEDIATELY POINTED HIS WEAPON DOWN THE ROAD, WHERE A RICKETY WHITE VAN WOBBLED TOWARD THEM. IT LOOKED LIKE IT WOULD FALL TO PIECES AT ANY MOMENT. EVEN AS A NOTE OF FEAR MIXED WITH ADRENALINE - HIS DRUG OF CHOICE, AND A POWERFUL ONE - DAVID COULDN'T HELP BUT SMILE AT THE UNIFORMITY OF IT. AS HE RAISED HIS WEAPON, SO DID THE EIGHT SOLDIERS AROUND HIM IN ONE, FLUID MOVE. EVEN ROBERTO - WHO SPENT EVERY MOMENT HE COULD PRANKING THE OTHERS, LEAVING HUGE SHITS IN THE TOILET EVERY CHANCE HE GOT, NO MATTER IF THEIR TOILET WAS A PORTA-POTTY OR THE AREA RIGHT OUTSIDE A SMALL TENT ON A HOT NIGHT - WAS ONE WITH THEM IN THEIR DEFENSE.



"STAY BEHIND US," DAVID SAID TO ZAIN, THE LOCAL MAN WHO WAS HELPING THEM. DAVID NATURALLY DISTRUSTED ANYONE HE MET OVERSEAS, BUT THAT WAS A STEP UP FROM HOW HE'D INITIALLY DISTRUSTED ANYONE OUT OF TEXAS'S BORDERS. HE'D GONE ON TO MEET A FEW DECENT MEN WITH NEW YORK AND BOSTON ACCENTS IN THE SERVICE, GERALD INCLUDED, WHO WAS THE SON OF A PIZZERIA OWNER FROM THE BRONX, BUT THE IDEA OF TRUSTING A MAN FROM *HERE* LIKE ZAIN SEEMED AS INSANE AS THE STORIES THAT BROUGHT THEM HERE TO BEGIN WITH.

STILL, HIS ORDERS WERE TO PROTECT ZAIN. HE KNEW THE AREA AND HAD INFORMATION, AND THUS, WAS VALUABLE. HE SEEMED TO LOVE HIS FAMILY AS WELL, WHICH DAVID COULDN'T HELP BUT RESPECT. AND THE TRUTH WAS, A MAN WITH TWO DAUGHTERS AND A WIFE, ESPECIALLY ONE WHO STILL MANAGED TO BE BEAUTIFUL WITH A SCAR LIKE THAT, HAD REASON TO WANT TO *LIVE*.

"HOLD ON," ZAIN SAID AS THE VAN CAME TO A STOP AT A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCHOOL. "I RECOGNIZE THAT MAN."

"WHO IS IT?" ROBERTO BARKED.

"DON'T SHOOT, PLEASE," ZAIN SAID, HIS VOICE STEADY. "THAT MAN IS MY DAUGHTER'S TEACHER. HE'S A SCHOOL TEACHER."

THE VAN SAT NEARBY, WITH THE MAN INSIDE PEERING OUT THROUGH THE GLASS, HIS EYES WIDE AND UNEASY AS HE LOOKED OUT AT THE GUNS POINTED HIS WAY.

"*HANDS UP!*" GERALD YELLED. "*COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP!*"

THE DOOR OPENED AND OUT CAME THE MAN, TIMID WITH A SHORT BEARD AND A CLOTH BAG SLUNG OVER HIS CHEST. HE HELD HIS HANDS HIGH.

"THAT'S HIM?" DAVID ASKED ZAIN, KEEPING HIS EYE AND WEAPON LOCKED ON THE MAN AND THE VAN BEHIND HIM. "THAT'S THE TEACHER?"

"YES," ZAIN SAID. "I'M CERTAIN HE'S JUST HERE TO WORK. HE--"

"WHAT'S HIS NAME, THEN?" GERALD ASKED. "WHISPER HIS NAME TO ME. AND THEN I'LL CHECK HIS ID. IF EITHER OF YOU ARE LYING, WE HAVE A BIG FUCKING PROBLEM."

ZAIN LEANED IN TO GERALD AND COMPLIED. DAVID DIDN'T HEAR WHAT HE SAID.

"WHAT'S YOUR NAME, GUY?" GERALD SHOUTED.

"Y-YAZEN!" THE MAN SAID, HIS HANDS SHAKING IN THE AIR. "I HEARD THERE WERE MEN HERE! I WAS JUST COMING TO MAKE SURE PEOPLE WEREN'T VANDALIZING --"

"ID!" GERALD YELLED. "LET ME SEE ID! AND DO IT SLOWLY!"

"HE MAY NOT HAVE --" ZAIN BEGAN TO SAY, BUT GERALD SILENCED HIM WITH A SHARP SHHT! DAVID FELT A PANG OF GUILT. BACK HOME, HE NEVER CARRIED A WALLET AROUND.

YAZEN, VERY SLOWLY, BENT AND OPENED UP HIS BAG. WITH HIS HAND STILL IN THE BAG, A SUDDEN, SHARP RATTLING SOUND CAME AS HE RUMMAGED.

THE LAST THING THAT DAVID RUDD FROM TEXAS HEARD AS A GREY BLUR POUNCED ON HIM WAS ROBERTO'S VOICE SHOUTING, "WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT SOUND?" DAVID FELT WET WARMTH ON HIS CHEST BEFORE HE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND THEN, VERY SUDDENLY, THERE WAS NOTHING.



ZAIN WATCHED IT ALL IN DISBELIEF, LIKE A MAN SUDDENLY THRUST INTO HELL. IT ALL SEEMED TO HAPPEN AT ONCE, IMPOSSIBLE HORROR FROM ALL ANGLES. RIGHT IN FRONT OF ZAIN, THE DISEMBODIED HAND CLAWED UP DAVID'S CHEST LIKE A WILD ANIMAL AND CLAWED HIS THROAT OUT WITH A SINGLE, POWERFUL DRAG OF ITS THICKENED, CRACKED NAILS. GUNFIRE SOUNDED, PUNCTUATED BY THE CONFUSED CRIES OF THE SOLDIERS, AND YAZEN THE SCHOOLTEACHER AND KILLER'S HEAD EXPLODED IN A SHOWER OF RED. THEN, FROM THE WINDOW OF THE VAN, BULLETS BEGAN TO FLY AT THEM.

BEFORE HE COULD EVEN PROCESS WHAT HAD HAPPENED, AN ARM WRAPPED AROUND ZAIN'S CHEST AND PULLED HIM AWAY FROM THE SCENE. AT FIRST, ZAIN THOUGHT HE WAS BEING KILLED BY THE SAME PIECE OF MAN OR MONSTER THAT MURDERED DAVID, THE SOLDIER. BUT THIS ARM WAS ATTACHED TO A BODY.

ROBERTO PULLED ZAIN, A GUN TO HIS HEAD, INTO THE SCHOOL.

"YOU FUCKING ANIMAL," ROBERTO HISSED. "YOU PIECE OF SHIT. YOU WORTHLESS FUCK."

"I DIDN'T - PLEASE, I THOUGHT - I THOUGHT -"

"SHUT THE FUCK UP," ROBERTO SAID, CLAMPING HIS HAND ROUGHLY OVER ZAIN'S MOUTH. THEY MOVED, TOGETHER, THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF THE SCHOOL UNTIL ROBERTO FOUND A WINDOW AND POSITIONED HIS GUN THROUGH IT. FROM THE LOOK IN HIS EYES, ZAIN COULD TELL THERE WASN'T MUCH TO DEFEND. HE GLIMPSED THROUGH THE WINDOW AND SAW A SECOND VAN HAD ARRIVED. TWO AMERICAN SOLDIERS WERE SHOOTING BACK. THEN ONE. THEN NONE.



THEY WERE ON THE GROUND, BLEEDING OUT AT THE LEGS AS THE MEN CAME OUT OF THE VANS. ROBERTO WITHDREW HIS GUN, TRUE FEAR IN HIS EYES. THERE WERE, OF COURSE, TOO MANY. A SINGLE SHOT WOULD EXPOSE THEM - THAT IS, IF THEY WEREN'T ALREADY EXPOSED.

THE MEN FROM THE VANS, THOUGH, SEEMED SINGULAR IN THEIR PURPOSE. THEY WERE CARTING THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS, ALL OF THEIR LEGS SHOT TO HELL, INTO THE VANS. THEY'D KNOCK THEM OUT BY SLAMMING THE BUTTS OF THEIR RIFLES INTO THE HEADS, AND THEN DRAG THEM LIKE SACKS OF GARBAGE INTO THE BACK OF THE VANS.

"WHAT IN FUCK IS THIS?" ROBERTO HISSED. ZAIN COULD NOT ANSWER.

WHEN IT WAS DONE, THE VANS LEFT. THERE WERE TWO SOLDIERS LEFT BEHIND ON THE GROUND NEAR THE BODY PARTS WHICH WERE NO LONGER MOVING. DAVID RUDD AND ANOTHER, A MAN WHOSE NAME ZAIN DIDN'T KNOW, WHO HAD TAKEN A BULLET TO THE HEAD. ACROSS FROM THEM, YAZEN'S BODY, TOO, HAD BEEN LEFT BEHIND.

WHEN THE VANS WERE OUT OF SIGHT, ROBERTO'S GUN WAS POINTED AT ZAIN.

"SCLM," ROBERTO SAID, TEARS STREAMING DOWN HIS FACE. "THOSE... THOSE... I..."

ZAIN, HIS VOICE STEADY, LOOKED ROBERTO STRAIGHT IN THE EYE. "I SWEAR ON MY FAMILY. ON MY DAUGHTERS. ON MY WIFE. I DID NOT KNOW. I THOUGHT HE WAS JUST... I DID NOT KNOW. I AM SO VERY SORRY."

ROBERTO BACKED AWAY, HIS GUN STILL POINTING AT ZAIN. FOR A MOMENT, ZAIN WAS CERTAIN HE WOULD FIRE. THEN, WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, ROBERTO TURNED AROUND AND RAN.

ZAIN WAS ALONE IN THE SCHOOL WHERE HIS LITTLE HESTER WAS TAUGHT BY THE MAN WHO LAY DEAD OUTSIDE. THE MAN WHO HAD SHAKEN THE CAN AND BROUGHT THAT DEAD ARM TO LIFE, PROVING TO ZAIN THE WORST STORY HE'D EVER BEEN TOLD WAS TRUE.

DEVILS WERE REAL.

WHILE WAITING FOR THEIR FATHER'S RETURN, JAMILA AND HESTER SPENT THE DAY PLAYING GAMES AROUND THE HOUSE. THEY WERE, OF COURSE, FORBIDDEN FROM LEAVING THE HOUSE BECAUSE OF THEIR DISCOVERY, BUT THE TRUTH WAS THAT TO JAMILA, SHE COULD GROW OLD WITHIN THOSE WALLS AND SHE'D BE CONTENT. OUTSIDE, IN THE WORLD, THERE WAS HELL WAITING. SHE KNEW THAT NOW. NEITHER SHE NOR HESTER, THOUGH, COULD PRETEND TO HAVE FUN WHILE PLAYING. STILL, THEY PLAYED. *MOM NEEDS TO SEE THIS, JAMILA THOUGHT. SHE NEEDS TO KNOW I'M OKAY, BECAUSE THEN SHE WON'T BE ALONE.*



THE ONE RELIEF WAS THAT HESTER DIDN'T MENTION THE MAN WITH NO BODY AGAIN. IT LEFT JAMILA TO WONDER WHAT MANNER OF WEAPON THIS POOR SOUL HAD BECOME AND WHAT THE BAD MEN DID TO HIM IN ORDER TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN, BUT AT LEAST HESTER DIDN'T SEEM OBSESSED WITH HIM AS SHE HAD THE NIGHT BEFORE. THE LAST THING JAMILA WANTED TO IMAGINE WAS HESTER WANDERING OVER TO THE HOLE AFTER CLASS AND DIGGING UP THE HEAD AGAIN, SATIATING HER MORBID OBSESSION... ONLY TO DISCOVER FIRST-HAND JUST HOW TERRIBLE A WEAPON THE BAD MEN HAD CREATED.

JUST AS HER MOTHER WANTED TO PROTECT JAMILA BUT COULDN'T, JAMILA WANTED TO ENSURE HER SISTER DIDN'T HAVE TO KNOW WHAT SHE DID: THAT SOME PEOPLE FIGHT WARS WITH GUNS AND BOMBS, AND OTHERS FIGHT WARS WITH PEOPLE.

JAMILA WAS IN BED BY THE TIME SHE HEARD HER FATHER COME HOME. HESTER SLEPT NEXT TO HER, SILENT. SHE'D TOSSED AND TURNED AND WHIMPERED THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, BUT THIS NIGHT, SHE WAS STILL. ALMOST PEACEFUL.

SHE TRIED TO LISTEN AS BEST SHE COULD, BUT SHE COULDN'T MAKE OUT HER FATHER'S WORDS. JUST THE FACT THAT THEY WERE PUNCTUATED WITH SOBS. HER MIND RUNNING WILD WITH IMAGES OF WHAT HER FATHER MIGHT HAVE SEEN, SHE FELL ASLEEP TO HIS QUIET BUT UNMISTAKABLY BROKEN VOICE.

JAMILA WOKE UP, HIS MIND RACING WITH VIOLENT, HELLISH NIGHTMARES THAT BLURRED INTO A VAGUE, LUNNERVING MEMORY THE MOMENT SHE WOKE. SHE REMEMBERED HANDS GRABBING AT HER, PULLING HER INTO THE EARTH, AND THEN BEING JARRED AWAKE BY THE SENSATION OF FALLING - AND THEN, NOTHING MORE.

SHE SAT UP, HER HEART STILL RACING AND LOOKED NEXT TO HER, WHERE HESTER SHOULD HAVE BEEN SLEEPING.

HER BED WAS EMPTY, HER BEATEN PILLOW NOT EVEN INDENTED FROM HER HEAD, AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN. JAMILA, FEELING DIZZY, SWUNG HER LEGS OVER HER BED AND PASSED HER PARENTS ROOM. THERE WAS NO TALKING, BUT SHE HEARD SNORING. SHE CHECKED THE BATHROOM. EMPTY. THE KITCHEN, THE LIVING ROOM - BOTH EMPTY. SHE HISSED HER SISTER'S NAME, NOT WILLING TO WAKE HER PARENTS, EVEN AS THE HORRIBLE TRUTH SET IN.

IN FACT, SHE KNEW IT BEFORE SHE EVEN CHECKED FOR HESTER. SHE WASN'T HERE.

SHE'D GONE BACK TO THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN MADE INTO A WEAPON.





HESTER STOOD BEFORE THE PILE OF BODY PARTS AND THE TWO COMPLETED DEAD BODIES OF THE GREEN MEN, THEIR SKIN WHITER THAN BONE AND THEIR BLOOD SO DARK IT LOOKED LIKE BLACK TAR IN THE DIM LIGHT OF THE STARS. SHE KNEW COMING HERE WAS A MISTAKE, BUT SHE COULDN'T STOP PICTURING THE HEAD AS HER MOTHER'S. SHE COULDN'T STOP IMAGINING THIS MAN'S FAMILY, WONDERING WHERE HE WAS. WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM. COMING HERE DIDN'T SEEM SO SCARY COMPARED TO HER HORRIBLE THOUGHTS. SHE'D BEEN THERE HUNDREDS OF TIMES. IT WAS JUST HER SCHOOL.

SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED, THOUGH... AND THIS PLACE WAS NO LONGER HER SCHOOL AND NEVER WOULD BE AGAIN.

HESTER DIDN'T HEAR THE VAN COMING UNTIL IT WAS PARKING. THE DOOR SHUT AND THREE MEN CAME OUT, ARMED WITH GUNS AS BIG AS HER BODY. WHEN SHE TURNED TO SEE THEM, SHE WANTED TO SCREAM - BUT THEN, AS THEY SILENTLY ADVANCED ON HER, A SOUND LIKE THE OCEAN ROARING BUILT FROM ALL AROUND THEM. SHE TURNED AWAY FROM THEM, PREPARED TO RUN, EXPECTING TO SEE ANOTHER VAN, BUT THERE WAS NO ONE ELSE.

IT WAS COMING FROM ABOVE. THE STARS IN THE SKY SEEMED AS IF THEY WERE GETTING BIGGER, ROCKETING TOWARD THEM LIKE FIREBALLS.

SHE HEARD THE MEN SCREAM BEFORE SHE DID.

TO BE CONCLUDED...

Stitched

TERROR

JONATAS GALLERY







Donatelli





Seymour











Donato



Donatos





MEPHISTO

